



OCR AoS3 Rhythms of the World, part 2: Africa, and Central and South America

David Guinane is Head of Music at Beaumont School in St Albans, and a freelance writer on music education. He is the co-author of the accredited study guide for the OCR GCSE music course.

by David Guinane

RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD: PART 2

In the last resource on OCR's Rhythms of the World area of study (September 2017), we looked at the Indian Subcontinent the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

In this resource, we'll look at the remaining styles and traditions included in the area of study:

- African drumming
- Calypso from Trinidad and Tobago
- Brazilian samba

Once again, this resource contains required knowledge as well as details of musical activities that will deepen students' understanding of the traditions.

AFRICAN DRUMMING

Africa is an immense continent, with a rich and diverse cultural and musical history. Of the huge number of musical styles and traditions to come from Africa, this AoS focuses on drumming styles popular in sub-Saharan Africa.

DRUMMING TRADITIONS IN AFRICA

When the term 'African drumming' is used in schools, it often refers to the use of djembes (often found in school classrooms, too often simply gathering dust). Since Africa has such a diverse and complex history, it's difficult to narrow down what music is played in which part of Africa, and where each tradition begins and develops. However, it's important that students don't think all African music is African drumming, so some specific examples can be useful.

Geography lesson

Ask students to do some research on two specific ethnic groups from west Africa: the Ewe people and the Mandinka. Guide their work so the following key points are covered (we'll go into more musical detail later):

Ewe people

- West African ethnic group, with significant populations in Togo, Ghana and Benin.
- Speak the Ewe language, follow a variety of religions.
- Drumming traditions have influenced Afro-Caribbean music and jazz.
- Use of bells and shakers important, and well as drums.
- Tradition of the master drummer.

Mandinka

- West African ethnic group, with significant populations in The Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Ivory Coast.
- Islamic groups, diverse range of languages spoken.
- The djembe believed to have originated with the Mandinka people, and forms a large part of their drumming tradition (as well as the dunun).
- The kora, a melodic instrument, also plays a huge role in the musical life of the Mandinka.

Of course, this barely scratches the surface of these two peoples, and is prone to generalisation, but some specific examples of African traditions are helpful to aid students' understanding.

Djembe and dunun

DJEMBE

Arguably the most iconic African instrument, the djembe is a single-headed, goblet-shaped drum. It is played with the hands (traditionally only by men), and can produce a number of different sounds. The basic sounds are as follows:

- Bass (B): a low-pitched sound made by striking the middle of the drum.
- Tone (T): a medium-pitched sound made by striking the drum halfway between the edge and the centre.
- Slap (S): a short, high-pitched sound made by striking the edge of the drum.

DUNUN (SOMETIMES DUNDUN)

The dunun is a large drum played with a stick. A double-headed drum, it is often worn on the shoulder, and often a bell-like instrument is mounted on the drum. Basic sounds are:

- Open (O): a full sound (hit the drum with the stick and let it ring).
- Muted (M): a muted sound (rest one hand on the drum to 'mute' the sound, and hit the drum with a stick).
- Bell (X): hit the bell mounted on the instrument.

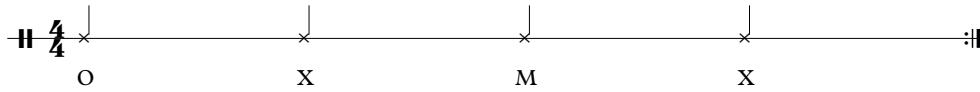
PERFORM AFRICAN MUSIC

It's so easy to start performing basic African rhythms. Get a load of drums (they could be djembes and dununs, but they don't have to be), and divide them into 'low' (dunun) and 'medium/high' (djembe).

Djembe part:



Dunun part:



Once you have this simple groove going, add the following features:

- Solos: bring the dynamic down and get individual students to improvise new rhythms over the top of the groove.
- Call and response: as an intro, appoint a 'leader' to play a rhythm that is then copied by the ensemble. Or use this technique mid-performance.

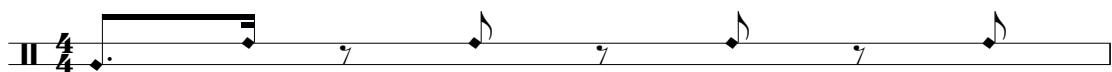
Doudoumba – 'The dance of the strong men'

If you're feeling ambitious, try this complex African dance, requiring three djembe parts, a bell and a clave:

Bells (agogo and gankogui)

An outstanding resource on Ghanaian drumming can be found here. It provides a 'mixer', allowing you to mute and fade different drums in a complex rhythmic cycle.

In many African traditions, particularly those of the Ewe people, an ostinato played on a bell-like instrument is essential to the 'feel' of African drumming. Though a constant, repeating part, it is usually entrusted to an experienced, competent musician. The interactions between the bell and other drums often produces the polyrhythms characteristic of African music (see below).



Key musical features of African drumming

POLYRHYTHM

Polyrhythm (literally meaning 'many rhythms') is the layering of a number of different rhythms. African rhythms are usually simple on their own, but when combined together they produce a complex, **polyrhythmic** texture. The rhythms may be similar, or may highlight different 'strong' beats in a bar, adding to the rhythmic complexity.

CROSS-RHYTHMS

Cross-rhythms are a type of polyrhythm involving two conflicting rhythms. The most basic example is **two against three**: one part plays triplets while the other plays quavers, with the same pulse. African music makes extensive use of a range of cross-rhythms.

Rhythms in African drumming are **cyclic** – they use short, repeated patterns.

Add singing to your study of African drumming. Some simple children's songs from Ghana, and ideas for how to combine singing and drumming, are available in an excellent resource from the Smithsonian Folkways collection.

The master drummer

In an African drumming performance, often a **master drummer** controls everything: the tempo, the rhythms, and the structure of the piece. The master drummer is a virtuosic musician who leads the ensemble, often improvising complex rhythms over a repeating cycle. The master drummer often plays the **talking drum**, an instrument played with a hooked stick, using strings to control the pitch of the drum. Using this drum, the master drummer can replicate the intonations of human speech, and convey messages with the drum (to the trained ear).

Master drummers to research on YouTube include **Ayan Bisi Adeleke**, **Mustapha Tettey Addy** and **Bolokada Conde**.

Finally, here is another famous African piece to perform with your students, the **Gahu**.

The musical notation for 'Gahu' consists of five staves, each representing a different instrument:

- Gankogui (bell)**: The top staff shows a bell-like sound with a single dot on each beat.
- Axatse (shaker)**: The second staff shows a shaker pattern with 'x' marks and arrows indicating direction.
- Kaganu (small drum)**: The third staff shows a small drum pattern with vertical strokes and 'y' marks.
- Kidi (medium drum)**: The fourth staff shows a medium drum pattern with '+' signs above some notes.
- Sogo (large drum)**: The bottom staff shows a large drum pattern with horizontal strokes.

Instructions within the notation:

- 'Play open w/sticks'
- 'w/sticks unless stated'
- 'w/sticks unless stated'

Time signature '4' is indicated at the start of each staff.

THE MUSIC OF CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Calypso and samba are two South American traditions that are often reduced to their most iconic images: the steel band and the Rio carnival respectively. Though important parts of each tradition, these styles have a rich and interesting history, and wide range of musical features to explore.

CALYPSO

Calypso music comes from Trinidad and Tobago, and it is popular throughout the Caribbean (see also a previous *Music Teacher* resource on Caribbean music, October 2013). Originally, the music drew upon both

Soca

Soca is a modern form of calypso that originated in the 1970s and 1980s. Modern soca often incorporates electronic instruments and music technology, and is popular among young people. It can be a fusion with a number of different styles, such as reggae, funk, soul and pop music.

African and French influences, and became known as the 'voice of the people'. Much like Western folk music of the 1960s, reggae or hip-hop, this music gives a voice to sections of society that can often feel isolated or ignored.

Calypso songs usually tell a story or comment on society. An **calypsonian** is the term used to describe a musician who tells stories through music. Modern-day calypso spans a range of genres, influences and styles.

● **Soca** is one of the most famous subgenres of calypso.

Mighty Sparrow

As is common for calypsonians, Slinger Francisco (b1935) took on a pseudonym, 'Mighty Sparrow', as a performance name. One of his most famous songs is 'Jean and Dinah (aka Yankees Gone)'. Written in 1956, the lyrics celebrate the departure of US troops from Trinidad. Ask your students to listen to the music and list key musical features under the following headings:

MELODY

- The phrases are simple, even and balanced.
- There is a recurring instrumental riff that mirrors the sung melody.
- There are a number of repeated phrases.
- The melody is harmonised in the chorus.

TONALITY

- The simple harmony uses common chord progressions, and mainly primary chords.
- The song is in a major key.

STRUCTURE

- The structure consists of verses, choruses, instrumental sections and solos.

INSTRUMENTS AND TIMBRE

- It has both solo and backing vocals.
- The vocalist combines singing with spoken lyrics, and some improvised wordless phrases (vocalises).
- The instrumentation is fairly straightforward: bass, guitar (or similar), percussion (bongos and other handheld instruments), 'horns' (trumpet and saxophone frontline).

TEXTURE

- Melody and accompaniment.
- Some very short unison passages.

TEMPO, RHYTHM AND METRE [C]

- 2/4 or 4/4, with lots of **syncopation**.
- Below is a common calypso rhythm: you may find it in the song's guitar accompaniment or its percussion parts:



- There is an almost constant off-beat rhythm on the bongo, and the guitar-like instrument provides an continuous rhythmic backing.
- The rhythm stops for a short time, usually at the end of the instrumental section, to allow for a short unison melody (you could refer to this as 'stop-time').

Once again, Smithsonian Folkways has released an excellent album entitled *West Indian Folksongs for Children*, which contains calypso versions of very simple tunes. The sheet music is available for free from the album page.

As with many calypso pieces, the song's lyrics are witty and satirical, and form a kind of social commentary. It's difficult to pin down specific musical features of calypso, as every song is different and draws on different influences. As you listen to more and more calypso, and complete lists like the one above, you will come across common features, but it's impossible to say that 'all calypso pieces use rhythm x or instrument y', for example.

SONGWRITING AND CALYPSO

As well as performing calypso music, you can encourage students to compose in this style. They will likely be used to songwriting, so use these skills and give them a ‘calypso twist’. Encourage socially aware lyrics, the use of backing vocals, and calypso-like rhythms in the accompaniment. Otherwise, structure, instrumentation, harmony (chord progressions) and melody are very free, and down to your students’ own creativity!

Steel bands

Steel band music began in Trinidad and Tobago. Many stories tell the tale of how disused oil drums became instruments, and the true story of steel pans’ origins will probably never be known. However, it’s clear that musicians have made complex instruments out of these oil drums, capable of producing a number of notes across a range of octaves. Steel bands play arrangements of traditional songs, as well as popular tunes, and a quick search on YouTube will yield many interesting results. Here are a few recommended tracks:

- The Original Trinidad Steel Band: ‘Yellow Bird’ (a steel band classic)
- Trindad All-Stars: ‘Curry Tabanca’ (a huge performance from a 1987 steel band competition)
- Silver Stars: ‘Shock Attack’ (another competition performance, from 2013)
- Colours Steel Band: ‘Shape of You’ (a modern cover of the hit song by Ed Sheeran)

Steel band music has spread right across the globe, but its roots are in Trinidad and Tobago.

Usually, the highest (and smallest) pans plays the melody, the **tenors** or **ping-pings**. The middle-pitched pans play a chordal accompaniment. They are known as **altos**, **guitars** or **cellos**. The **bass** pans play the lowest notes.

A drum kit and other percussion instruments will often accompany the performance. A rolling, **tremolo** effect is used on long notes.

Performances contain lots of syncopation, and melodic phrases are played very expressively. In traditional steel band music, harmony is simple, focusing on primary chords.

SAMBA

Samba, one of Brazil's most famous musical traditions, is heavily influenced by the drum rhythms of Africa. The slave trade brought millions of Africans to Brazil to work in sugar plantations, and they brought their music with them.

Samba originally refers to a guitar tradition in Brazil: samba were rhythms played on guitars and accompanied by small percussion instruments. Nowadays we would associate Brazilian guitar music with **bossa nova**, a style that developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Contemporary **samba** is a percussion-based style that fuses African influences with American-style marching bands. (See also a previous *Music Teacher* resource on samba, August 2014.)

RIO CARNIVAL

Think Samba, think Rio carnival. The festival held before Lent every year is considered the biggest carnival in the world. During the carnival, two million people per day fill the streets of Rio de Janeiro. The carnival is typified by floats, samba dancers in majestic costumes, and samba drummers parading down the streets. It has a long and rich history, and videos of the Rio carnival (this one, for example) are a great place to start when studying this musical tradition.

Instruments and rhythm

A ‘bateria’ is a term for a samba band. There are many different styles of samba, such as *samba batucada* or *samba-reggae*. Here are some typical samba percussion instruments, their roles in the bateria and some typical rhythms they might play:

SURDO

This large drum is played with a soft beater, and muted with the hand. It provides a strong rhythmic pulse. There are different sizes of surdo.

Low Surdo
Medium Surdo
High Surdo

REPINIQUE

The lead drum. Tuned high, this drum is played with a hand and a stick, and cuts through the ensemble. It plays all sorts of rhythms, signalling breaks and changes as a piece progresses. It might play something like this during a repetitive section:

R R L m R R L m R o R L m R o R L m

R = Right
L = Left
o = open
m = muted
r = rimshot

CAIXA

The caixa is a snare drum that provides a constant driving rhythm. This comes directly from the American marching band tradition.

AGOGO

This metallic bell usually has two pitches, and it is played with a stick. It has its origins in the bells of African music.

TAMBORIM

This small frame drum is tuned very high and is played with a beater.

GANZA

This shaker-like instrument plays constantly during a repeated beat or groove.



Musical features of samba

- A huge range of percussion instruments.
- Music is led by the repinique – the musician playing the repinique will control breaks and changes of section, as well as the beginning and ending of a samba piece. The repinique player will also use a whistle to signal these changes.
- Call and response.
- The rhythm is simple time – samba music is almost always 'felt' as two beats.

Vocals, brass instruments and guitars will often add a melody and chords to a samba piece. There are a number of famous samba tunes: 'Brazil' is a real classic.

PERFORMING SAMBA

Below are some guidelines for performing samba with your students.

Combine the suggested rhythms above

The rhythms listed above for each instrument will give you a convincing groove for **samba batucada**, a popular form of samba. You don't need authentic instruments – just find the closest thing you can. Remember to feel the groove in two: one, two, one, two, etc. (Encourage your students to shift their weight from one foot to the other – it helps the groove and looks cool).

Signs and signals, using the whistle

Any whistle will work for samba, but a three-pitched samba whistle is relatively cheap to buy. Get the attention of your players with a long whistle, then 'count them in' with your whistle. When you want to change things, stop or perform a break, get the musicians' attention with another whistle. Use hand signals to show your players what you want to happen, then count in your break or stop with the whistle (usually four short 'peeps' on the whistle).

Breaks

Some possible breaks include:

- Starting and stopping.
- Solos: one instrument repeats its rhythm as a short solo.
- 'Hits' during solos: while one instrument repeats a rhythm, everyone else plays single 'hits', lead by the repinique player.
- A unison rhythm (the 2:3/3:2 clave rhythms work really well).
- Call and response: the repinique player plays a short rhythm, which is then repeated by everyone else.
- A precomposed break: this is more complex, but lots of examples can be found online.

Take it further: samba reggae

If performing samba batucada goes well, and you want to stretch your samba bateria even more, try these patterns, known as the *samba reggae*:

Surdo (High/Med/Low)

Caixa/Repinique

Agogo

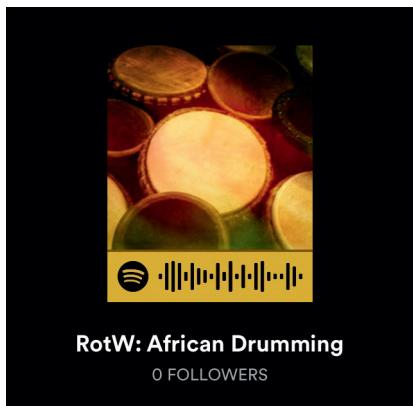
Tambourim

Ganza

Spotify playlists

Spotify playlists for each of the areas covered in this resource can be found here (links as well as 'Spotify codes' that can be scanned on a smartphone are included):

African drumming



RotW: African Drumming

0 FOLLOWERS

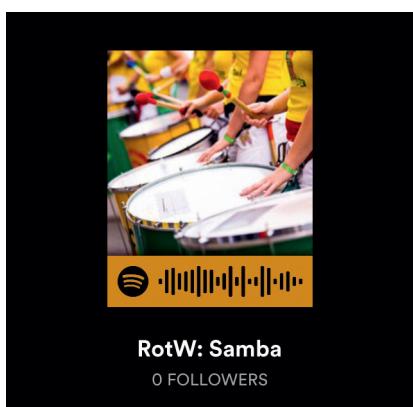
Calypso



RotW: Calypso

0 FOLLOWERS

Samba



RotW: Samba

0 FOLLOWERS

RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD: CLOSING THOUGHTS

When studying the Rhythms of the World AoS with your students, it's important to focus on background information, key musical features, and important artists and performers. Hopefully you can do this through a combination of performance, composition and listening.

However, it's also crucial that we instil a wider sense of cultural appreciation in our students. These traditions do not exist as isolated genres or styles. They are intrinsically linked to culture, religion, society and geography. A broad study is required to ensure students have a more complete understanding of 'world music'.

The concept of fusion, and an understanding that styles and genres do not exist in a bubble, is also key. Talk to your students about 'influences of' or 'elements of' different styles of music in what you expose them to.

With your students, consider the elements that run through the Area of Study as a whole:

- Sheet music and notation are hardly ever used.
- Aural traditions: music is taught primarily by ear.
- Music is often used to accompany special events, or plays a wider role in society.
- Often associated with dancing.
- Harmony is often fairly 'simple' (if there is a harmonic language at all), and complexity lies in melodic or rhythmic work.
- Improvisation and decoration play a huge role in the melodies and rhythms found in this area of study.

THE 'LONG ANSWER' QUESTION

In every exam paper, there will be a nine-mark question that looks a little bit like this:

You will hear and extract of calypso music played three times. Write a paragraph, using sentences, that describes the music of this extract. You may wish to refer to rhythm, metre, melody, instrumentation, texture, vocal features, structure or any other music features that you feel are relevant.

Here are some tips to help your students do as well as possible in the 'long answer' question.

Planning: brainstorming and tables

If you are going to hear the extract three times, encourage your students to plan their answer during at least **the first two plays** (they will still have plenty of time to write their full response). This will help students write succinctly and clearly, as well as avoiding repetition or irrelevant points. There are a couple of options:

- A 'brainstorm': each arm of the brainstorm is a different element, and musical points are written around each bubble.
- A table: with two columns, one listing the elements referred to in the question, the other where students write their points.

Write detailed sentences

Give specific musical detail. Here are a few examples showing how students can gain lots of credit by adding musical details (referencing a typical piece of calypso music):

- 'There is a guitar playing': a good start, but more can be said.
- 'There is a guitar playing mainly primary chords, as an accompaniment, using syncopated rhythms common in calypso music': now we are referencing the role of the instrument in the ensemble, as well as a point about harmony, and one about rhythm. Furthermore, this shows the candidate has an understanding of the style as a whole, and is applying it to the extract.
- 'Later, in the extract, the guitar stops and the vocalist sings a phrase unaccompanied. This is known as 'stop time': music changes, and the best long-answer responses reference the way the extract changes and develops over time.'

Practice makes perfect

Any piece of music can be a potential long-answer question. Encourage students to begin by just making brief notes on the music they hear, and work up to writing an extended response. Scaffold their learning by building it up gradually; start by writing paragraphs on one element in small groups, then individually, then a whole answer.